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COUNTRY : USSR

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT: "The Fundamental Scheme of a Front Offensive Operation", by Lieutenant-General V. Baskakov

DATE OF INFO: July 1961

APPRAISAL OF
CONTENT : Documentary

SOURCE : A reliable source (B).

Following is a verbatim translation of an article titled "The Fundamental Scheme of a Front Offensive Operation", by Lieutenant-General V. Baskakov.

This article appeared in the 1961 Third Issue of a special version of the Soviet military journal Voyennaya Mysl (Military Thought). This journal is published irregularly and is classified TOP SECRET by the Soviets. It is distributed only within the Ministry of Defense down to the level of Army Commander.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

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The Fundamental Scheme of a Front Offensive Operation

by

Lieutenant-General V. Baskakov

The concept of the "fundamental scheme of an operation" is not familiar to our readers, so we shall define at once what we mean by it.

All operations of one war are waged by almost one and the same means of armed combat, and most often the organizational forms of troops in all operations likewise remain unchanged. Thus, within the extreme diversity of the specific features of the front offensive operations of the Second World War, one can discern specific traits characteristic of almost all of them. This was also noted in the operations of the First World War.

The substance of these general traits characteristic of all operations of a given war and taken in total we propose to call the fundamental scheme of an operation. By summarizing the basic characteristics of operations into a single scheme, it is easy to understand not only the substance and meaning of each of these characteristics, but also the mutual relationship and meaning of them in the operation as a whole. Such an examination of the basic characteristics of an operation of the last war is very convenient and makes it easier to establish graphically their suitability or unsuitability under modern conditions and to determine the fundamental scheme of an operation in a future war.

The fundamental scheme, put forth by us, of an offensive operation of a front in the period of the Second World War (diagram 1) is not a copy of any operation that took place. Nonetheless, among the great number of operations, there is none whose basic and fundamental characteristics would not be reflected on the given diagram.

We shall make clear why the fundamental scheme of a front offensive operation in the last war was the way it was.

The basic features of an operation are determined first of all by what type of armed forces, what arm of troops is the main one and what constitutes the basis of their combat strength. As is known, in the last war the chief means for conducting military operations and the basic combat strength of the armed forces were ground troops, consisting of combined arms armies (which in turn consisted of rifle divisions) and partly of large units of armored troops (tank and mechanized corps organized by brigades).

Besides this, the level of development of industrial production, science, and of technology in many countries was, by the beginning of the Second World War, already high enough to guarantee production of a variety of military equipment and arms. This also permitted the belligerents to bring their operational art out from the stagnant position in which it found itself at the end of the First World War. At the same time, it was still impossible to bring about complete motorization of all ground troops, as a result of which the basic combat complement of armies and fronts remained the rifle divisions. The quantitative growth and the qualitative development of artillery, aviation, and other means of neutralization, the raising of their destructive capabilities, striking power and range of operation still could not essentially alter their roles as combat and operations support weapons.

The aviation, artillery, chemical, engineer, airborne and other arms of troops with all of their combat equipment only assisted in accomplishing major combat and operational tasks, but independently they could not completely accomplish them.

By virtue of this, the outcome of combat and of an operation depended mainly on the success of the operations of the infantry divisions, which constituted not only the basis but also the absolute majority of the forces of ground troops. The destruction of the most important groupings of the enemy's ground troops was

the main purpose , the basic content of operations and of combat operations in general. In this, all attention was concentrated on routing the enemy in the tactical and immediate operational depth, where the significant part of his infantry divisions was located.

This was reflected in essence in the whole character of the last war and in the methods and forms of conducting combat operations, including the fundamental scheme for mounting an offensive operation of a front.

The depth of a front operation was determined by the disposition of the ground troops, the means for reinforcement, the control points, the rear installations and the basic forces of the tactical aviation of the group of enemy armies, and was 200 to 300 kilometers.

An offensive began, as a rule, with a breakthrough of the solid front of the enemy's combat formations on the most important axes and swiftly developed to the immediate operational depth, frequently leading to the encirclement of enemy troops. Such a method of conducting an operation was the only one possible, because the weapons of neutralization in that period, with all allowance for their concentration, could not by themselves destroy the enemy's divisions of ground troops and the means for their reinforcement. Our analogous divisions could rout, destroy, or capture the personnel of the enemy divisions only when they had the necessary superiority in forces and with advantageous operational preconditions.

Under these conditions, an important role in taking the decision for planning a front operation was played by the choice of the axes for the main and auxiliary strikes, the concentration on those axes of the necessary forces, and the establishment over the enemy of a superiority which guaranteed the success of combat operations. The theory of the main strike was fundamental in the operational art of the period of the Second World War. Therefore, the main strike also occupies the most important place on Diagram 1, which we cited.

The exploitation of a breakthrough was accomplished by committing tank and mechanized troops into the battle, which assured high speeds for the offensive. The study of the operational exploitation of a breakthrough utilizing a mobile arm of troops, of the deployment of this arm of troops, and of the bases of the organization and preparation of its large units was also the most important in the operational art and in the military science of that period as a whole.

In the fundamental scheme of a front offensive operation of the last war there was shown the use of large units of armored troops for purposes of operational exploitation of a breakthrough and completion of the encirclement of the basic grouping of the enemy's troops.

Obviously, there is no need to prove that the fundamental scheme of a front offensive operation of the last war can no longer express the content of an operation in a modern nuclear/missile war.

Consequently, the problem consists of discovering in what measure the new fundamental scheme of an operation in a modern war differs from the former scheme, which elements from the old scheme retain their significance, which will disappear completely, and which will be transformed under the new conditions.

The degree of these differences is determined by the changes which occurred in the postwar period and which can occur in the future, primarily in the development of the productive forces and the political conditions of life in a society. The significant development of the productive forces of a society and of the weapons of armed combat cannot fail to cause a substantial change in the forms and methods of conducting combat operations in modern warfare and, certainly, introduces specific corrections into the fundamental scheme of a front operation.

The basic means of armed combat and of the basic combat strength of the belligerents, as we have already examined earlier,¹ will not be divisions of ground troops and not ground troops as a whole, no matter how they might be supplied with the weapons necessary for conducting a mobile war, but nuclear/missile weapons and the troops which assure their use, the destruction of which is the main goal of the military operations of the belligerents.

In connection with this, the number of divisions in the complement of a front will decrease significantly, and additional large units and units which ensure the use of nuclear/missile weapons will be included. However, this does not mean a belittling or negation of the important role of ground troops in routing of the enemy. The role of ground and airborne troops will be determined by the need to complete the rout of an enemy who has been subjected to nuclear strikes, to take and consolidate an area, to establish the forward edge of contact with the enemy's troops, and to protect and defend the operational rear area.

The content of the fundamental scheme of a front offensive operation in modern warfare must also specify all of this.

Considering the nature of nuclear/missile warfare, one can raise the question: will a front offensive operation take place at all? Will the war not end with the conduct of the initial massive nuclear/missile strike in conjunction with the utilization of chemical and bacteriological weapons? Indeed, at the moment there exist bases for raising such questions. It is enough to cite, for example, the possibility of the complete annihilation of whole countries by nuclear weapons in short periods of time. Despite this, however, we consider that the operation as a specific form

¹ Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", First Issue, 1960.

of armed combat is also retained in modern warfare. It is impossible to reduce a future war only to an initial strategic nuclear strike. Such a strike, unquestionably, is a definite part, a stage, of such an operation. After these strikes an attempt must be made to conduct simultaneously and successively a series of operations in various theaters of military operations and operational axes. The basic content of these operations will be the conduct of powerful nuclear/missile strikes and vigorous actions by ground and airborne troops, the Air Force, and the Navy.

The main purpose of a modern operation, as is known, is the destruction of the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons. The front, which operates in specific demarcated lines and under the conditions existing in one theater, cannot carry on combat against, for example, intercontinental missile bases located on different continents because it does not have the necessary intelligence organs and weapons of destruction. It is clear that it is necessary to call on the weapons of the General Headquarters of the Supreme High-Command for combat against them.

In connection with this, the place of the front operation in modern warfare will be determined, in our view, by which enemy nuclear weapons the front must destroy, under the given conditions. It is known that the nuclear/missile weapons of the USA are distributed in groups: the weapons of operational-tactical designation for ground troops, with limited tactical-technical potentialities, the majority of which are located close to the line of contact of the troops, and a part not farther than 100 to 150 kilometers; medium range missiles (2,000 to 3,000 kilometers), which are distributed at a depth of 500 to 1,500 to 2,000 km from the line of contact of the belligerents; and finally intercontinental missiles with a range of 8,000 to 10,000 kilometers or more.

The front's composition will be changed, depending on which group (groups) of nuclear/missile weapons it must destroy. Thus, if the mission of a front is to destroy and annihilate the operational-tactical nuclear/missile weapons and the first echelon of ground

troops, then its composition can be close to that currently accepted and the depth of such an operation will not change substantially in comparison with the experience of the last war. In this case, the destruction of the operational and strategic nuclear/missile weapons and the following echelons of ground troops, located beyond the limits of the depth of the front operation, must be accomplished with weapons of the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command or it will be necessary to organize either a group of fronts or a command and staff for the theater of military operations with the appropriate combat weapons to perform these missions.

In our view, the most acceptable version of the mission of a front is the liquidation of all nuclear/missile weapons designated by the enemy for combat on a given axis and distributed within the boundaries of a given continent. In this case, the meaning of a front as the basic level of command in the organization of armed combat is preserved and removes the necessity of establishing intervening levels (a group of fronts or a command for the theater of military operations is eliminated). The General Headquarters is thus freed from carrying out the missions which the front formations are able to perform. Besides this, destruction of the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons requires the immediate deployment of the operations of ground and airborne landing troops throughout the depth of the given axis. This will be more difficult for the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command to carry out than for the front, which has these troops at its disposal and is able to organize their coordinated operations. In this case, the nuclear/missile weapons located outside the boundaries of the offensive zone and of the missions of the fronts and chiefly on other continents and on the ocean will be destroyed by weapons of the General Headquarters of the Supreme High Command.

In connection with this, the depth of a front operation must be sharply increased, and this will be its new identifying characteristic. It should be noted that the calculated depth of a front operation since the last war has grown repeatedly. In the postwar

years it was 300 to 400 kilometers, with the appearance of nuclear/missile weapons it was 500 to 600 kilometers, and at the present time it reaches 1,000 kilometers and more.

It seems to us that the depth of a front operation, as well as the width of its offensive zone, must be defined on the basis of the role of the front in routing the enemy. Taking the above statements into account, we consider that the depth of a modern front operation must reach 2,000 to 3,000 kilometers. All enemy nuclear/missile weapons designated for combat in a given axis will be distributed within the boundaries of this area. The width of the front zone will also grow to 500 to 700 kilometers and more.

Thus, the front operation of the future must become an actual deep operation which meets the modern requirements for the simultaneous destruction of the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons throughout the depth of a given theater of military operations.

In the operations of past wars, simultaneous fire effect against the entire depth of the enemy's defense could not be realized because of the lack of sufficiently powerful and long-range weapons of neutralization (with the exception, of course, of aviation) and in practice did not exert a decisive influence on the outcome of an operation. Nuclear/missile weapons permit accomplishment of the simultaneous neutralization of the enemy at a depth of hundreds and even thousands of kilometers, and the full motorization and mechanization of the armies and the mass use of airborne troops ensures the swift transfer of operations to the operational depth where the enemy's basic weapons of nuclear attack will be located. In connection with this, modern front operations will be distinguished mainly by the delivery of massive nuclear/missile strikes on the enemy's nuclear weapons and other important objectives and by the quick exploitation of the results of these strikes by ground and airborne landing troops.

An essential modification will occur, in particular, in the operations of the ground troops. Full motorization and mechanization

of ground troops, it would seem, facilitates swift operations for the purpose of the most rapid penetration into the enemy's operational depth, of exploiting the results of the nuclear/missile strikes delivered against him, and of completing his rout. However, the possible speed of advance of large units of ground troops and the rate of the offensive (100 kilometers and more per 24-hour period) still will not guarantee the immediate gaining of nuclear and other targets of operational significance or their destruction.

Even the maximum speeds of a modern operation allow an enemy to reorganize to a certain degree, to transfer the surviving nuclear weapons to other regions, to bring up new forces from the zone of interior, and to organize resistance to the attacking troops. Therefore, we must look for something else, namely, for the operations of troops with significantly greater speed than that which ground troops have.

During the Civil War and the Second World War the assignment and skillful use of the mobile arm of troops as an independent operational category yielded great advantage, and there are no grounds to consider that in modern warfare this principle will not be accepted.

The conduct of deep operations and the transfer of vigorous operations to a significant operational depth of the enemy's formation in short periods of time will be more essential now than in past wars. Therefore, the significance of the mobile arm of troops not only does not decrease, but even increases.

The mobility of troops must be such that they can get to regions where the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons are located literally just a few hours after the delivery of our nuclear strikes and before the enemy succeeds in re-establishing his own combat effectiveness and in eliminating consequences of these strikes.

This can be achieved only by airborne landing troops, as well as motorized rifle units and large units, transferred to the

enemy's operational depth by air transport. However, one must speak not of the dropping or landing of separate operational airborne landing forces into the enemy's deep rear area, but of the massive use in the operation of airborne and motorized rifle troops as a mobile arm of the troops.

Reviewing the fundamental scheme of an operation in modern warfare (Diagram 2), I should like to draw the reader's attention to the question of the principle of the main strike and its role in a modern operation. We examined this problem in detail in an article published in the first issue of the Special Collection in 1960. Under modern conditions, to attach the operations of the basic forces of the front and primarily of nuclear/missile weapons to a specific axis, even a very important one for the operations of ground troops in the front zone, is completely incorrect. The concentration of forces and weapons on a specific axis in an operation can no longer be a definite operational principle and must be replaced by the principle of concentration of the basic efforts of a front on the destruction of the enemy's nuclear/missile weapons and the basic groupings of his ground troops. In this, the ground troops of a front will function not as large groupings and not on a solid front, but on several axes as separate large units and even as units, while carrying out a broad maneuver during the operation.

As an example, I should like to note the decision taken by the commander of the southern side in an operational exercise in 1960. One of the most important characteristics of this decision, in our view, is that in it several new means of conducting an operation under conditions of the mass use of nuclear/missile weapons were shown. The need to create cumbersome groupings of ground troops which are a good target for the enemy's nuclear attacks is precluded by the solution in the operation.

Such will be, in our opinion, the basic characteristics of an offensive operation of a front in a future war which also must determine the outlines of the fundamental scheme of this operation.

The diagram presented reflects these characteristics and can be looked upon as typical for a front offensive operation.

This diagram shows that the primary weapon for routing the enemy in an operation is nuclear/missile weapons and not ground troops and that divisions of ground troops and airborne troops are used only for purposes of completing the enemy's destruction.

The operation begins with a powerful nuclear strike on the nuclear/missile weapons and the basic groupings of ground and airborne troops, the aviation and the navy of the enemy. Simultaneously with this strike or immediately thereafter the troops of the first operational echelon shift to the offensive, and an airborne landing operation is carried out. Graphically the destruction of nuclear weapons and the defeat of the enemy's troops by the nuclear weapons of a front are indicated on the diagram by areas of complete neutralization and by zones with high levels of radiation.

The basic groups of missile troops and the fundamental apportionment of missions among them are reflected on the diagram. The use of medium range missiles with a firing range of up to 1,000 to 1,500 kilometers, which are designated for the destruction of the troops of a group of the enemy's armies and nuclear/missile weapons within the limits of this range, must be closely coordinated with the operations of the first operational echelon of the ground troops and airborne troops which have been thrown into the immediate operational depth. The use of long range missiles with a firing range of 4,000 to 5,000 kilometers must be coordinated with the execution of basic airborne landing operations in the operational depth of disposition of the enemy's troops. It is possible that the number of classes and groups of nuclear/missile weapons can also be different if this depends on considerations of an economic or technical nature. From an operational viewpoint, however, it is sufficient to have missiles of the indicated classes as the weapons of a front.

The most important principle of a deep operation is expressed on the diagram as the simultaneous neutralization by nuclear weapons of all of the most important targets and primarily of the enemy's weapons of mass destruction, his ground and airborne troops, and his aviation in the entire depth of their possible disposition to the borders of the continent, in conjunction with the offensive of the first echelon of ground troops and with the operations of powerful airborne forces in the deep operational rear area of the enemy.

The ground troops have been represented as two echelons. The first operational echelon consists of two armies consisting in all of 12 to 15 divisions and designated for completion of the rout of the troops of the enemy's group of armies. The second operational echelon consists of one army with 7 or 8 divisions, whose mission is not to develop success in the operation, as was done formerly, but defense of the operational rear area of the front and combat with the operational airborne landing forces of the enemy during the whole operation. The large units of the second echelon of the front can be utilized in case of the need to augment the efforts of the attacking armies of the first echelon and also as operational landing forces. The divisions which have been operating in the first echelon and have lost their combat effectiveness are removed from combat and are used to fill out the complement of the second echelon.

The airborne landing troops are represented on the diagram as an airborne army consisting of three or four airborne divisions assigned to seize a landing area for the operational landing forces of the front, and also for coordinated operations with the first operational echelon of the ground troops.

On the whole, according to the diagram of an operation, the composition of a front consists of four army commands in all uniting 25 to 30 motorized rifle, tank, and airborne divisions. As is known, during the last war approximately 30 to 35 and more divisions were included in the composition of a front. Considering that now the front's zone will be increased by two

or three times, the number of divisions of ground troops and airborne troops in a modern operation will be reduced approximately by three times.

As rough operational calculations show, a front needs approximately 250 to 300 nuclear (including about 50 hydrogen) warheads with an overall yield of 120,000 to 150,000 kilotons to accomplish its missions. Up to 100 missile launching mounts and about 30 to 40 delivery aircraft are needed by the front in order to utilize these warheads. With effective use of this quantity of nuclear/missile weapons, about 25 to 30 missile bases and depots of nuclear warheads, 30 to 40 airfields, 25 to 30 divisions of ground troops, 15 to 20 naval bases, and other objectives can be destroyed.

The forces and weapons of the front will be echeloned to a depth of 2,000 to 3,000 kilometers. A depth of distribution of the forces of a front of 200 to 300 kilometers, as was the case in the last war, does not answer the new conditions.

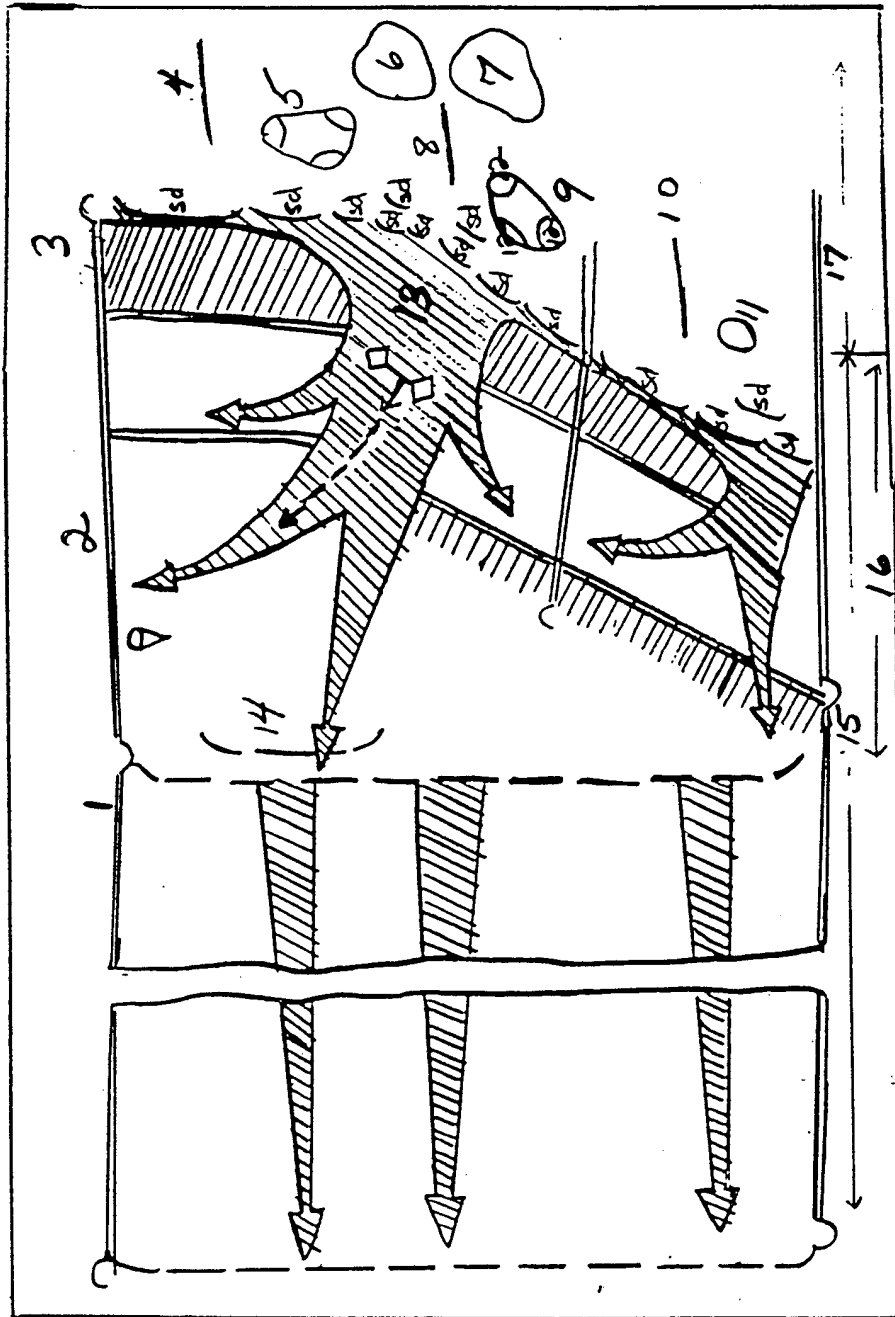
A front control echelon of the existing organization will no longer be able to direct a front operation conducted according to the proposed scheme. The modern field control echelon of a front, besides a headquarters, must have commanders and staffs of the missile, ground, and airborne troops, antiaircraft defense, and aviation. This will correspond to the composition of the front and the particular features of troop operations in the operation.

A front operation, obviously, must be planned by stages. The first stage, for example, might include the neutralization and destruction of the enemy's main forces and weapons. The main content of it must be the repelling of the initial nuclear strike of the enemy and the delivery of the first nuclear/missile strike by forces of the front. The second stage can consist of completing the rout of the enemy's forces and weapons. Its content will be an offensive by ground troops, the execution of

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landing operations, and the delivery of nuclear/missile strikes during the offensive.

In our opinion, this is the way the fundamental scheme of a front offensive operation in a future war must appear.



Legend to Diagram 1:

1. Reserves of a group of armies (5 to 10 percent of the forces).
2. Second defense zone and reserves of the armies (10 to 15 percent of the forces of the group of armies).
3. First (main) defense zone (75 to 85 percent of the forces of the group of armies).
4. Army - 10 rifle divisions.
5. 2nd echelon (reserve) of the army.
6. Tank division, tank corps, mechanized corps.
7. Army - 9 rifle divisions. 2nd echelon of the front.
8. Army - 7 rifle divisions.
9. 2nd echelon (reserve) of the army.
10. Army - 5 rifle divisions.
11. Reserve of the army rifle division.
12. Rifle division.
13. Mobile group of the front - tank army (tank corps, mechanized corps).
14. Second echelon (reserve) of the front (army rifle corps).
15. Depth of a front operation - 200 to 300 km.
16. Depth of an army operation - 120 to 150 km.
17. Depth of the disposition of troops and rear service elements of the front - 200 km.

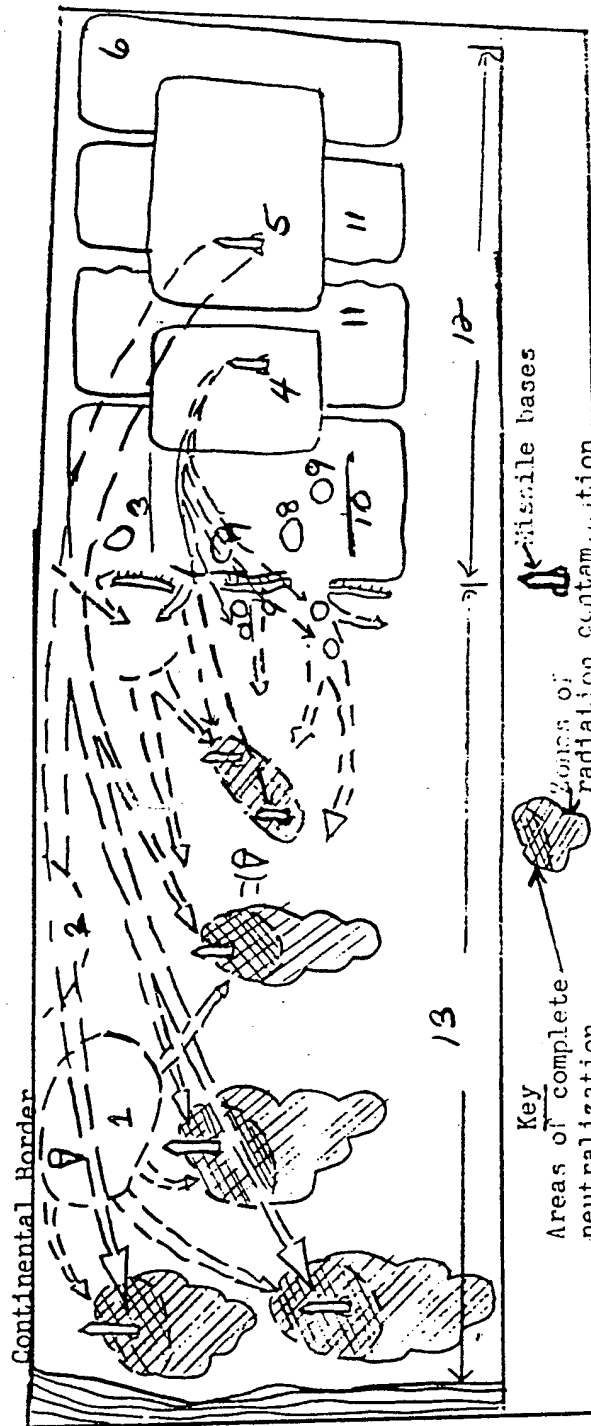


Diagram 2: Fundamental Scheme of a Front Offensive Operation in a Modern War

Legend to Diagram 2:

1. Airborne landing army - 5 or 6 divisions.
2. Neutral countries.
3. 1 army - 5 to 7 divisions.
4. Medium-range missiles (range 1,000 to 1,500 km).
5. Long-range missiles (range 4,000 to 5,000 km).
6. Echelon of airborne landing troops (airborne landing army - 3 or 4 divisions).
7. Tank division.
8. Tank division.
9. Tank division.
10. 2 army - 5 to 7 divisions. 1st operational echelon of ground troops.
11. 2nd operational echelon of ground troops (defense army of the operational rear area) - 7 or 8 divisions.
12. Depth of echeloning troops of a front - 2,000 to 3,000 km.
13. Depth of the front operation - 2,000 to 3,000 km.